



## Handstitched in Space and Time: Unpicking the Second-hand Consumption Cycle through an Auto-Ethnography of a Vintage Patchwork Cloak

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### ABSTRACT

This article explores through narrative autoethnography: how a single, vintage, handmade garment travels subjectively through spaces and times in what Arnould and Thompson (2005 p. 871) call “process-oriented categories of acquisition, consumption, and disposition”. Second-hand consumption involves more than a single moment but instead covers a spectrum of activities and practices, extending backwards and forwards through time and the imagination. Equally, it travels in and out of different spaces as it moves from one owner to another. The cloak, like other vintage and second-hand garments, is theorised as always in process, on its way to somewhere else and towards the future. The author’s subjective and entangled relationship with the cloak, is used to express the complex bricolage of modern second-hand consumption, with historical and geographical components at the acquisition, possession, and disposition moments. Including reflections on existing literature on second-hand clothing cultures, this paper theorises that second-hand consumption is like a patchwork, with the individual pieces of fabric representing spaces and times and its bricolage construction echoing its symbolic, experiential, and embodied nature.

### KEYWORDS

Autoethnography, second-hand consumption, the social life of things, consumer culture theory, vintage fashion.

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## INTRODUCTION

In this paper I weave a narrative auto-ethnography of a single garment—a hand-made vintage patchwork cloak—through the consumption stages of acquisition, possession, and

disposition. My reflections in this paper come from the perspective of someone who is a passionate second-hand and vintage trader, and one-time vintage shop owner, as well as an academic researcher with an interest in the theory of second-hand consumption, I tell a subjective story, using the cloak as a vignette for what Arnould and Thompson (2005, p. 869) call the “socio-cultural, experiential, symbolic, and ideological” aspects of consumption. I aim to argue that second-hand consumption is both spatial and temporal and that individual garments become patchworks of spaces and times, incorporating the past, the present and looking into the future. Based on my personal embodied relationship with the cloak, I ponder questions such as those posed by Kopytoff (1986, p. 66), such as: “Where did it come from and who made it? What has been its career so far? What are the ages and periods in its life? How does its use change? What happens when it comes to the end of its life?” These and others, are unpicked through an unfolding narrative encounter with this single garment which hangs on my office wall. I view the garment as a story because it has a beginning (acquisition), a middle (possession), and an “end” (disposition). But the end, in this case, can only be imagined in the future, because it remains as my treasured possession, and I cannot imagine ever disposing of it. I am only one owner of the cloak, and in the past, it may have accumulated other biographies in the possession of others. It is collecting narratives along the way, like Appadurai (1986) argues about things, it has a life of its own. I do not attempt to moralise or make any recommendations for sustainable consumption. But I agree with Fletcher (2015, p. 227) that “by cultivating an emotional and experiential connection between person and object, we can disrupt our dependency on consumption of new goods to construct meaning and our sense of self”. This cloak represents what she calls “emotionally durable design” (Fletcher 2015, p. 227), meaning that it will stay in one space for longer, have a longer life overall, and will not succumb to fast obsolescence like so many other first-hand goods.

I have chosen this subjective first-hand style for this paper because, as Seaman (2000, p.163) explains, methodological approaches like autoethnography allow for the researcher to be open and for the phenomenon, which is the cloak, to “reveal or disclose itself in its fullness and complexity”. This is not a material account of the historical facts of the cloak but a reflective story, woven with theoretical perspectives, including critical debates on clothing, consumption, and second-hand studies. I aim to fill a gap by offering a single garment account focusing on a one-off and unique vintage piece of apparel bought on eBay. I attempt to better understand consumption by “re-storying” (Grant et al. 2015, p. 3), which means allowing “a re-interpretation and re-narration of lived experiences in line with coevolving preferred personal and relational identities”. I use this cultural artefact to illuminate the consumption cycle and contribute to the discourse on space, time, and consumption. According to Pallasmaa (2016, p. 171), paraphrasing Bachelard (1983),

"material imagination" and "things and images arising from matter project deeper and more profound experiences, recollections, associations, and emotions than images evoked by form". Therefore, by reflecting on my experience in acquiring and possessing this individual piece of clothing, I am affected by my "multi-sensory" experience of it, so it is not just something I see on my wall, but something I feel through what Bachelard (1971, p. 6) calls "polyphony of the senses" including its haptic, visual, olfactory, and aural qualities.

Firstly, I provide a theoretical context by discussing previous studies underpinning the experiential and symbolic aspects of second-hand consumption. Next, I describe the material qualities of the garment and explore the cultural significance of patchwork. Thirdly, I investigate through the prism of this cloak, concepts of space and time and their influence on consumption, focusing on how they relate to consumption rituals and practices. My fourth stage reflects on the three-stage process of "acquisition, possession, and disposition" in relation to the patchwork cloak, linking to spatial and temporal dimensions, and investigating what is known and not known and what lies in the imagination. Finally, I conclude and reflect, and propose patchwork as a metaphor for second-hand consumption.

### **Second-hand Consumption**

The theory underpinning this paper derives from Consumer Culture Theory (Arnould and Thompson 2005), social anthropology, and the cultural practices surrounding second-hand clothing and consumption, illuminating the phases within the second-hand consumption cycle. Hedonic, symbolic, and aesthetic practices dominate the second-hand marketplace and as Peters (2014, p. 214), state that "vintage" is a "vibrant consumption landscape", "produced in interactions between cultural actors". It is found to be no longer driven by economic and thrift motives, but instead experiential benefits, such as identity-seeking, treasure hunting, desire for authenticity, perceived superior quality, social interaction, nostalgia, and ethics (Pugh 2020). Research has found that spatial practices imbue goods with symbolic meaning and are fundamental aspects of second-hand shopping (Gregson and Crewe 2003). In alternative, self-styled spaces, often away from the mainstream, connections with sellers, specialists and curators are formed, and communities are created, making the search for vintage clothes a social experience (Parker and Weber 2013). In the second-hand marketplace, goods change hands and accrue different meanings and value through the stages of acquisition, possession, and disposition. Through multiple and repeated transitions, the goods themselves take on lives of their own and develop cultural biographies (Kopytoff 1986), and Appadurai (1986, p. 13) declares that items such as this cloak, which could be categorised as an "heirloom", has a "more noticeable" "biographical aspect" than other more everyday items. It is this biography which I observe through my examination of the cloak as it passes through (in my experience and imagination) acquisition,

possession, and disposition.

I argue that this cloak is a sartorial emblem of space and time and makes the ideal centrepiece around which to discuss the complexities of modern second-hand consumption. As a second-hand item in the circular economy, the cloak may go through many lifecycle iterations, with new owners acting like heirs to precious riches like it. The goods in circulation, like the people who take ownership of them, are constantly becoming, with time and space acting as connectors in an ever-changing network of meaning transformations (Ture and Ger 2016). As Boradkar (2012, p. 224) describes: “their biographies get written on their bodies as scratches, dents, chipped paint, discolouration, torn labels”. However, that these things pass down to new owners, with flaws and injuries, sometimes increases their appeal. At the heart of each stage of transition, is a revaluing process which inscribes new value into goods as they proceed on a constant future trajectory from production to exchange, and to disposal (Boradkar 2012). Unlike the notoriously throwaway nature of Fast Fashion, second-hand goods are often slowly consumed; lengthening the duration of ownership, and postponing obsolescence. The goods take “paths and diversions” into new spheres of meaning, highlighting that at every transition point from one owner to another, there are new interpretations, complex connections, and little-known forms of value (Appadurai 1986, p. 16). To return to my revered cloak, this can be illustrated by its current role on my office wall, as an *objet d’art* when once it may have been a fashion garment, or a stage costume. Its potpourri nature makes its existence and its journey as varied as the patchwork itself. Like the Indonesian sarongs which Allerton (2007), describes, it takes on a social life and a career. This contrasts with the shorter, more predictable lives of many mass-produced garments in dominant mainstream fashion retail. The multiple past, present and future lives of my one-off patchwork, handmade cloak are complex, with many exciting possibilities, which makes it the ideal subject for this paper.





**FIGURE 1** Vintage handmade patchwork cloak as worn by the author. Photograph by author.

### ***The Cloak***

The focus of this paper is a rare, one-off, handmade, and vintage heirloom piece: a patchwork hooded cloak, skilfully sewn from a myriad of colourful, printed, and textural fabrics and bought on eBay. It is “patchwork,” created using an ancient technique in which small scraps and fragments of fabrics are cut from old and discarded garments and household items, from various places, spaces, and times, and sewn together to make a big piece of fabric which is then crafted into a garment. The outer layer is a light silky patchwork featuring squares and rectangles of cloth, of assorted sizes, stitched together in such a way that they change direction around the body. At the front-centre they are large and vertical, and around the side and back of the cloak, they are diagonally positioned, giving dynamism and shape to the design. The garment appears handsewn from a variety of spotty, striped, plain, and floral fabric pieces, and every piece may have a unique and distant provenance, that I may never know. Underneath the cloak’s light, vivid and striking outer layer is a heavy black woollen lining, making the cloak reversible, to be worn either with the patchwork on the outside or the inside. There is a single black wooden toggle fastening at the neck. My knowledge of fashion history encourages me to think it dates to the late 1960s, or early 1970s, from an era when the Hippie movement embraced natural crafts brought back from India on the Hippie Trail, including applique, crochet, and patchwork (Worsley 2000). There is a naivete and a handmade look and feel to the patchwork stitching, with the finishing the work of hands not machines, and several loose threads inside it. This was an era when handmade items flourished, as a rejection of industrial manufacturing and the fashion system (English 2007), and to express rebellion and protest (Welters 2015).

The cloak has a clandestine Harvey Nichols label inside the top layer, which took me some time to locate, having read about it in the eBay seller's description, and seen on their photographs. What is not known about this garment is whether the label is original or was added later in bricolage fashion by a maker. Also not known is whether both layers of the cloak are innately connected, or one was added later. I am well-connected with many retail professionals, and clothing aficionados on social media, but investigations proved futile, so I received no answers to my questions about the cloak's origins.

Patchwork is defined as "recycled garment fabric scraps or old sample book pieces into curtains, tablecloths, bedspreads, toilet bags, a skirt and dressing gowns, which were used to decorate, brighten and warm" (Malthus and White 2018, p. 22). Historically, the supplies for patchwork may have been gifted from friends and family, so that within its very fabric are sewn memories of social bonds, which were often explicitly featured to act as mementos (Fitz Gerald 2003). Along with other artisan crafts, patchwork has woven its way in and out of fashion through the recent decades. Originating in China and Egypt, 5,000 years ago, more recently in the UK patchwork was created by women in the domestic sphere, as a leisure pursuit during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Victoria and Albert Museum 2021). It was also a way of extending the life of fabrics and was used for soft furnishings and clothing (Victoria and Albert Museum 2021). During the latter half of the twentieth century, such traditional artisanship fell into steep decline, due to changing lifestyles and the advent of industrial machine processes (The Quilters Guild 2021). Patchwork's popularity is in resurgence today, both as a craft skill and as a fashion material. Along with other hand-making skills, like knitting, crochet and embroidery, patchwork has recently been seen a mini revival (O'Sullivan 2020). Participants in vibrant making community spaces enhance their physical and mental wellbeing through craft activities, often sharing their accomplishments on social media platforms (Vyas, 2019).

Garments like this patchwork cloak may inspire and motivate individuals to learn new making skills, because they act as exemplars of what is possible and sometimes as starting points for a "remaking" process which renews and transforms garments and sees them as ongoing projects to keep (Holroyd 2017). It could be regarded as a slow, rare, individual, and authentic alternative to the fast, ubiquitous, mass-produced, and superficial clothing which dominates mainstream markets (De Castro 2019). In a contemporary redefining of the term luxury, this garment could also be classified as "slow luxury," (Crewe 2017) because it connects its owners to ideas of history, craft, and tradition; it triggers the imagination, creates mental pictures of designers, makers, and craftspeople, and connects wearers and owners to the people who made them. In the modern era which Zygmunt

Bauman called “Liquid Modernity” where the only certainty is uncertainty, such qualities in a garment, “imbue it with a sense of intertemporal interconnection” linking the past, present and future (Sarial-Abi et al. 2017, p. 182).

### ***Spatialities of Second-hand Consumption***

Like time, geography lies at the heart of how fashion is consumed and is a decisive factor influencing the experience of clothing, whether in the spaces it is displayed, whose body it is worn on, and where, and the locations in which it is seen and appreciated (Potvin 2009). As Hui (2012, p. 196) argues, the numbers and types of spaces that individuals and things occupy as part of what is called “consumption”, has extended “beyond the moment of purchase”, to encompass multiple retail formats, homes, performance, and other possession spaces, in what Crewe (2017, p. 1) calls a “recursive loop”. These iterative and complex spatialities are fitting for second-hand consumption which itself is centred on re-use, recycling, and repurposing of previously used goods in new spaces with new owners. Within these various spaces are stages of mobility and immobility, argues Hui (2012), with consumption occurring during and alongside other activities (Warde 2005). This cloak, hanging on my office wall as I work, becomes part of my embodied space, because I do not just view it, outside of myself, but it has become part of me. Yakhlef (2015, p. 555) considers space to be a flow “understood through bodily movement, rather than structured by marketers”. This is true for goods from the second-hand market, where consumers often have greater agency and freedom in consumption space. Throughout the phases of acquisition, possession and disposition the cloak travels through several spaces—those of shopping, sewing, owning, displaying, sharing, and divestment—cumulatively gathering meaning, knowledge, and stories at every turn.

### ***Temporalities of Second-hand Consumption***

Consumption, especially second-hand, no longer refers only to the moment of buying, but to a multitude of moments and periods, and interpretations of time: for example, taking time, making time, spending time, extending time, speed, slowness, nostalgia, and longevity. Traditionally, most academic literature on consumption has tended to focus on the acquisition stage and what happens after purchase is given less attention (Joung 2013). In second-hand consumption, however, the post-purchase space has extended possibilities, because the clothing has multiple circular trajectories, which encompass different spaces. The dynamics of contemporary consumption involve travel and movement through spaces. These concepts are entwined into the layers of meaning and memory in old clothes, like the cloak I am focusing on in this paper. By definition, vintage points to concepts of time, referring to its age, in the same way as vintage wine and

vintage cars (Pugh 2020). Fashion is fundamentally about time, and notions of being either “on trend” or “out of date.” Each generation discovers and reinvents the looks of the past. This can be the fashion industry taking and reworking past looks, or it can be individuals finding new ways to express themselves through vintage fashion. I define this patchwork cloak as “out of time” as well as “timeless. “Anachronistic dressing” as defined by McRobbie (1988) is wearing clothes which are not at the height of fashion, and as someone who values uniqueness and individuality, I prefer it to being “up-to-date” or “in-vogue”.

In multiple ways I link this cloak to concepts of time. I imagine the cloak as a material memory with a history and a heritage; it was made using skills and crafts, which are fading in time; it took time to make as well as time to find, and it is timeless and durable. Bhabha (1994) calls this “heterogeneous time” in which objects from the past are repeatedly transformed in a reproductive process giving them new meanings in the present and future. In this way, heirlooms are constantly becoming and continually changing alongside their consumers (Ture and Ger 2016). through time, as goods travel, they are often changed and added to, accruing personal and bespoke meaning (Hui 2012).

Another way I view time when observing this cloak is using the fast and slow terminology of recent decades. Time will be stretched out and slowed down through all stages of the consumption process of this patchwork cloak, in relation to the speed and agility which characterises often disposable first-hand fashion retailing. It looks like it was originally handmade by an artisan, which would have taken time. In acquiring such a garment, consumers in the second-hand sphere take time in the social and experiential enjoyment of treasure-hunting and browsing, motivated by entertainment and fun, more so than the drive to find one thing. Spending time, trawling through numerous possibilities to serendipitously find a gem, is a pleasure that second-hand shoppers enjoy (Herrman and Soiffer 1984). Subsequently, at the stage of possession, the current owner spends time appreciating this garment, gazing at it, touching, stroking and adoring the garment in a sensory embodied experience, and it will stay for a long time in my possession. Its maintenance, rejuvenation and repair may also take time and effort. Finally, at the stage of disposal, which is a ‘passing on’ or ‘passing through’ activity, a great deal of time is spent decision-making about what to do with it, due to personal and emotional attachment to such garments. This is a durable item, with a potentially long life. Even after I have passed it on, its final obsolescence will be delayed, because there are other hoarders, collectors, designers, creatives, and social historians always on the look-out for such unique objects and moving them on through multiple life cycles (Boradkar 2015).



## ACQUISITION: FINDING THE CLOAK

I found this cloak serendipitously, during an aimless eBay browsing session using some of my favourite search terms: “vintage, handmade, colourful.” What Bardhi (2003) calls the “thrill of the hunt” for unusual items, is a different process in digital space from that of physical space. After typing the search words, a wide variety of goods are listed which resemble the key terms and can be sorted and filtered as required. Ertz et al. (2017, p. 72) would define me as a hunter, rather than a browser because my “attention is already concentrated on a specific sub-category of products”, albeit sometimes quite broadly defined. The eye-catching garment stood out in the fast scrolling, because of its bright kaleidoscope colours and distinctive shape, which were shown in high-resolution excellent quality photographs.

The last known owner of the cloak was a graphic designer who sold it to me for £145 on eBay. She revealed in a message, how she came across it, also quite by accident. She said she had herself bought it on eBay a while ago and had it exhibited in her studio as an inspiration for her textile printing, rather than as a practical garment. She had displayed it on a mannequin for a while but needed to declutter prior to a house move so let the garment go. She demonstrated the bittersweet emotion which often accompanies getting rid of things to which they are attached, and the concern that individuals have for its future journey (Lovatt 2005). However, it is not known whether the seller was being truthful in these messages. Nevertheless, I enjoyed hearing the cloak’s story from its previous owner and their sentiments in selling it. This exchange of stories can sometimes be lost in mainstream first-hand fashion, where extended global supply chains can alienate individuals from goods and their sellers. The cloak’s past is ongoing in its current life. Within its bricolage of patches, it has the potential to tell a multitude of stories, making every square a conversation piece on its own.

It is widely accepted that the act of consumption is highly symbolic and extends beyond the purchase of goods, to embrace socio-cultural identity, just like the goods being acquired (Arnould and Thompson 2005). In the case of second-hand shopping, “finding, hunting, and identifying” more closely describe the acquisition practice than the phrase “shopping” (Holland 2017, p. 153). Appadurai’s “Following Things” philosophy creates a transition stage between links in the “chains of consumption” (Hui 2012), and at each stage individual specialist “keepers” can pass their knowledge and information along with the goods, in personal interactions.

Unique garments like the patchwork cloak in question are found today in bricks and mortar and digital spaces, increasing opportunities for what Ture and Ger call (2016, p. 21)

“playful excavators” to mine for “precious gems. The sensory environment of sometimes clandestine thrift and charity stores is attractive to certain kinds of shoppers, and the musky aroma does not deter them, but verifies authenticity (Clarke et al. 2012). In these marginal spaces, relationships are formed, there is haggling around prices, and the spaces are not sanitised like the first-hand shops (Crewe and Gregson 1997). These local, independent spaces, often including street markets, car boot sales, garage and driveway sales are experiential retail environments that celebrate a sense of disorder and abandonment (Boradkar 2015). These are contexts that give items different regimes of value (Murakami 2016) with each different space in which the item is located, giving it a fresh biography as it enters a new cycle and a new set of circumstances. The patchwork cloak appears handmade rather than factory-produced and therefore, other spaces can be imagined when considering its acquisition. The haberdashery store, for example, is also a sensory space, providing “jackdaw pleasures” (Lane 2007, p. 153) and all the components of making, such as discarded fabric remnants, ribbons, buttons, and trimmings, can be found amongst the cast-offs in the thrift and charity shop.

Geography is often, in other ways used to provide symbolic meaning and add value to objects (Crewe 2017). This cloak has a Harvey Nichols, Knightsbridge label which gives it symbolic geographical potency, as a fashion piece. Its value also derives from the imaginary pictures of the artist’s studio, which was referred to in the eBay message from the seller. But now I have this cloak in my home and it is decorating surfaces and acting as a prop in domestic space. Despite the cloak in question, being found on eBay, its owner imagines it before that inhabiting bohemian and creative spaces, underground markets, and avant-garde thrift stores.



**FIGURE 2** The garment label. Photograph by author.

Slow fashion (Fletcher 2007) is a mindset which comes into play at all stages of consumption. It involves a focus on maintaining clothes and combining them in new ways, with the clothes linking to the sense of self, more than an outward “image” to be accepted by others (Fletcher and Grose 2007). It also embraces traditional craft techniques, local markets, local materials, and small-scale production (Fletcher and Grose 2007). A Slow fashion philosophy includes buying and using second hand garments and materials (Overdiek 2018). Therefore, I would classify this patchwork cloak as “slow fashion” in numerous ways because it offers a thoughtful consumption alternative, which appreciates the value of clothes and their personal nature (Crewe 2017). This is against a landscape of Fast Fashion, which emphasises volume, cheapness, speed, and anonymous global production (Bick et al. 2018). It celebrates traditional textile skills passed through generations (Somers 2019). It is something that took time to make and cannot be rushed; it needed resourcefulness, skill, and a potpourri of discarded fabrics, which would have been thrown away in factory processes. Although its modern-day heir may not have been personally responsible for the skilful stitching and may not possess the skills or patience to do this, by owning it and/or dressing in it, they are declaring that they endorse the values

associated with craft: environmental sustainability, personal connection, and respect for materials (Somers 2019).

As Crewe (2017) argues, clothing accrues value as it circulates, and has the affective charge of “love objects”, like books that have the names of their previous owners written inside the front cover, or garments that have been altered to fit the previous wearer. Nostalgia, too, is a central motivation for consuming second-hand and vintage clothing and other paraphernalia (Duffy and Hewer 2013). As Veenstra and Kuipers (2013), argue, the trend for old and vintage pieces arose when consumers were beginning to feel dislocation with fast-changing and throwaway fashion and wanted something comforting, which reminded them of the past. When they experience nostalgia, people will spend considerable time seeking out objects of desire like this (Huang et al. 2016). In acquiring goods like this cloak, the dedicated second-hand shopper takes time to find things on purpose because they get immense pleasure from the browsing itself, not from some later delayed pleasure, like in formal first-hand shopping (Chattoe 1999).

### **POSSESSION: KEEPING THE CLOAK**

In acquiring and possessing this cloak I used judgement, knowledge, skill, passion, and love: all the features that Campbell (2005, p. 27) uses to describe craft consumption. Although I did not make the garment myself, I have appropriated it into my own domestic milieu and with it, the values I associate with craft. My reason for “handmade” being one of my favourite eBay search terms is that I value handicraft skills and the resulting objects above machine-made and factory produced. Now I have it displayed on the wall of my home office, next to the four decades of British Vogue and the collection of Doc Martens, acting as sensory stimulus and to be discussed with interested students and colleagues at the beginning of online teaching seminars and meetings.

The possession stage is sometimes called “usage,” (Dommer and Winterich 2021) but this word implies a practical and functional object which is part of everyday use, and this cloak is less “used”, than admired and adored. It is not being worn, on the one hand or discarded in the dark recesses of the wardrobe, or “trapped in a liminal storage space” (Stanes and Gibson 2019, p. 30), in what Evans (2012) calls “coffins” for clothes. Instead, it is living another life, that of art. Clothes are designed to be worn on the human body, and it is often assumed that the most loved clothes are the most often worn. In my possession however, like many other clothing items I feel emotionally connected to, instead of being worn, the patchwork cloak has taken on a role of a painting, or a piece of art. It has become a visible part of my “extended self” (Belk 1988). In my domestic “working from home” environment, it is quite literally part of my extended self, when I use it as a



conversation piece in discussions between colleagues and students. Its value to me is such that it has “a soul, meaning and an authenticity” (Crewe 2017, p. 69.) which far exceeds most of my other garments.



**FIGURE 3** The cloak in my office. Photograph by author.

Wardrobes are at the heart of conversations about possessing and owning clothes. Amy Twigger Holroyd (2017, p. 162) calls the wardrobe a “resource in a state of flux”, and talks of it being shaped in conjunction with concepts of self. The collection of clothes that an individual possesses plays a key role in their identity and is considered an extended self (Belk 1988). It is a personal and very visible expression of the individual’s personality and values. Our clothes are never entirely separated from ourselves, and they externalise memories, previous lives, and relationships (Woodward and Greasley 2015). Clothes are also part of a performance of self in life (Goffman 1990), acting as costumes for whoever we want to be. Rather than “spilling out” in a negative sense, my wardrobe extends beyond



a piece of furniture onto surfaces throughout the house. As a “serious leisure” eBay trader of clothing, I have little “accumulation, abandonment and lingering of clothes” (Stanes and Gibson 2017) but instead clothes are constantly in motion. Handbags hang on walls, scarves drape over chairs, and jewellery decorates doorknobs. As a previous shopkeeper, I use my home as a kind of shop, displaying artefacts throughout to celebrate their intrinsic beauty, so that questions of how often items are worn, become irrelevant. Many visitors have commented on my quirky habit of keeping price tickets on clothes and accessories, which could also be a symptom of my previous retail life. In this way, this cloak is very much a living garment, which although not worn on the body is treasured and adored. It does not succumb to the hidden spatialities of the wardrobe which Stanes and Gibson (2017) call liminal space and Evans 2012 a “coffin for clothes”.

Wearing this cape, the human body becomes part of the space. It also becomes the medium through which to perceive the world around it, hence it is producing the space and it is the space (Ribeiro et al. 2015). Fashion has a relationship with the human body, which makes it uniquely different from other consumer goods. The body is the interface for sensory perceptions of space (Lefebvre 1991), and it is also a representation of the world, therefore having a dual purpose (Ribeiro et al. 2015). Either wearing or simply touching and feeling the cloth of this garment, the cloak becomes part of an individual’s perception of space around them. Hanging on my wall, I touch the cloak every time I pass it, and its haptic qualities make it part of my embodied experience of being with clothes, even when not wearing them, but observing them externally from my body (Stanes and Gibson 2017). Merleau-Ponty (1968, p. 48) points out the essential integration of the sensory realms: “My perception is not a sum of visual, tactile and audible givens: “I perceive in a total way with my whole being: I grasp a unique structure of the thing, a unique way of being, which speaks to all my senses at once”. The cloak is part of my space and surroundings.

Second-hand shopping leads to a complex array of multiple spatial practices post-purchase, including “repairing, restoring, and cleaning” (Holland 2017, p. 153). These practices take garments into other spaces like menders and dry cleaners. Just like the artisanship of the seamstress or tailor, who crafted this piece, there are specialist skills required to maintain it and prolong the life of second-hand garments in second, third and subsequent lives. When individuals are emotionally attached to possessions, they are likely to extend their use by restoring, repairing, and repurposing them, and finding alternative uses to extend the lives of things (Evers et al. 2018). Fletcher and Grose (2012) highlight the resurgence of alterations and repair services today, making a return, due to the scarcity of materials and resources, so that clothes are being valued and maintained like they once were, when darning, patching, and edging were the norm. In these spaces, social

relationships are formed around the curatorship of the garment, with owners and specialists discussing the fastness of dyes and the danger and risk of embellishments being damaged in cleaning, sometimes with risks involved, and decisions to be made around them.

The cloak arrived in a parcel from eBay in exceptionally good condition, so it was not necessary to take these risks on this occasion. But I have developed a close professional relationship with the local dry-cleaner due to the less pristine garments I have acquired, more in the category of "wounded bird" (Holland 2017, p. 153), but still with enormous potential. In an active and productive form of consumption, new owners of second-hand goods make them their own by turning up hems, mending seams, repairing loose trims and buttons, and can extend to more complicated and intricate remodelling and resizing, sometimes outsourced to specialists. Sometimes a "refreshing" process is instigated by the current heir (Ture and Ger 2016) which comprises the garment being recontextualised and stamping the current owner's identity on it. This is cumulative crafting, and in the case of this cloak, could be adding pockets, changing the button, or another modification. All these practices involve time being invested is spent "repairing, restoring, cleaning, and storing" (Twigger Holroyd 2017) vintage items like this cape: garments which are sometimes discovered as "wounded birds" but seem to have potential (Holland 2017, p. 153). These types of garments are called by Holland (2017, p. 154) "witnesses or survivors of the past" and are worth the time and effort spent restoring, because their owners are emotionally connected with them. Heike Jenss (2015, p. 8) describes such garments as "the materialisation of time" and "fashioning memory," therefore they are worth repairing for their emotional qualities. The cloak was in excellent condition for its age, showing minor wear and tear, which may be a sign that it was little worn.

### **DISPOSITION: MOVING THE CLOAK ALONG**

The third stage of the consumption cycle is disposition, which sounds so final, but in the case of second-hand, is often "moving things along" (Gregson et al. 2007). Stanes and Gibson (2017, p. 32) explain that disposition includes a variety of redistribution and recirculation routes, involving, giving, selling, gifting, donating, and throwing away. Whilst most of the attention in the literature on second-hand consumption is traditionally focused on acquisition, (Hetherington 2004 cited by Evans 2019, p. 507), the decision to clear things away, or cast them out, is for me, even more interesting and complex. Evans (2019, p. 507) proposes 3 Ds as categories within this area of consumption: "devaluation, divestment and disposal". He explains that these comprise unpicking and unravelling the connections made at the acquisition stage. When we get rid of things, we are often getting rid of part

of ourselves (Lovatt 2005) and therefore, feelings of grief and sadness can commonly be evoked, as Paden and Stell (2005) argue. This emotion is triggered further because disposition is often driven says Lovatt (2005) by key life stages including house moves (which appeared to be the driver of the patchwork cloak's sale), changes in self-concept, marriage breakdown, and even death.

If the seller has space, they are more likely to keep items, but on the other hand a lack of space will more likely lead to disposal (Jacoby et al. 1977). This was indeed referred to by the eBay seller who sold the cloak, as she was moving and "had to get rid of my hoard"... to "make space." The growth of the second-hand and circular economy has provided an explosion of opportunities for divesting of goods in a society that is overflowing with excess. These numerous options are affecting how individuals make such decisions (Ertz et al. 2017). This means that disposition now has its own spaces, just like acquisition does. In disposition spaces, transactions are often accompanied by friendly interactions between seller and buyer, friendly dialogue taking place between individuals about the thing being sold, such as the messages on eBay about the patchwork cloak and the subsequent "feedback" process. The seller also, in their pictures and descriptions, provides a window into their own spaces: where the garment is displayed, where it has been worn, and possibilities for its spatial performance. As Paden and Stell (2005) explain, positive feelings can emerge between sellers (or donors) and buyers in the transaction process, which create a strong bond between them. Charity shops are another space for the disposition of goods, acting as temporary custodians of clothing which has been donated, and acting as conduits towards future users (Pugh 2021), and onward to new spaces. Alongside the most common reasons for donating—according to Laitala (2014), wear and tear, poor fit, and fashion boredom—a lack of storage space is an important consideration. The person disposing of the item, often cares about and feels invested in its continued appropriate use and this is especially so, when the item has affective family heirloom connections (Dommer and Winterich 2021). As part of this cloak's disposition process by its previous owner, I enjoyed exchanging stories about its past, present, and future and continuing the garment's biography.

Whilst the charity shop sector is growing, at the same time, the commercial second-hand market is expanding, with sites such as Depop, Vinted, Vestiere, alongside the well-established eBay, beginning to encourage individuals to sell their own goods rather than donate them (Thredup Resale Report 2021). They all have easy-to-use apps now which make this very convenient and fast, and there is profit in it for the individual. This means that while the overall second-hand market is set to more than double by 2025 (Thredup Resale Report 2021). To sell garments and other goods successfully on sites like eBay, it is

essential to develop photography, writing and pricing skills. There are several books to support the novice seller (Eckhart 2020; Henry 2021), which has become a serious leisure activity. The patchwork cloak listing on eBay was professionally executed because it had several excellent quality photographs and a description which referred to all the garment details and told its story. Like the connoisseurs who develop extensive knowledge and appreciation for coffee or wine (Quintao et al. 2017), the connoisseurs of clothes develop communities of practice.

## CONCLUSION

In this paper my aim was to unpick through a narrative auto-ethnography, the acquisition, possession, and disposition stages of a single garment: a hand-made vintage patchwork cloak, with special attention paid to space and time. My subjective story aimed to capture both my own experience of the cloak and its spatial and temporal nature. Like patchwork, hand crafted pieces contain memories and mementoes of the item's past. They tell their stories repeatedly in new spaces and new times: individual garments become patchworks of spaces and times, both in the past, in the present and looking into the future. I found that my personal entanglement with the cloak is based on an embodied relationship which began with acquisition and is extending through possession, with disposition only imagined sometime in the future.

I have given an autoethnographic account of the acquisition, possession, and disposal of a single garment; a second-hand, vintage, and handmade patchwork cloak, which was bought on eBay and hangs on my home office wall. Materially, I have described the cloak, including the nature and significance of patchwork as an ancient handicraft. I have underpinned this with literature on the ritualistic, symbolic, and experiential aspects of consumption, reflecting on the role of space and time. I have found second-hand consumption to be fundamentally spatial and temporal and in every stage of consumption, in which the spaces of past and present are being reimagined into the future.

Individual garments, like this cloak, are both materially and in the imagination, patchworks of spaces and times, with the combinations of fabrics from a multiplicity of places and people, and originating from past times, but always in the present moment and on a trajectory to the future. To me, they symbolise both the moment that fashion consumption has arrived at today, standing at the precipice between the past and the future, and the dispersed and fragmented space that represents modern second-hand consumption. Patchwork and contemporary second-hand consumption have many things in common. They both value mementoes and souvenirs within their fabric, acting as sewn memories,

adding emotional value to material goods. They both place heavy reliance on different spaces, and times, taking things from many disparate origins and combining them together. They are both unfinished projects and are handed on from generation to generation. And lastly, both patchwork and second-hand consumption slow down and extend time. Just like the 'passing on' of things in the second-hand cycle of consumption, I hope that the story of space, time and consumption will also have a future trajectory, with other academics continuing to sew their own ideas and thinking into the patchwork of literature.

#### **AUTHOR'S NOTE**

Dr Esther Pugh is a Senior Lecturer at Leeds Business School at Leeds Beckett University, and prior to that Esther managed the visual merchandising of UK high street fashion retail brands. Her PhD focuses on vintage fashion fairs and the unique magic they weave in physical but temporary spaces. Esther's current research interests are bricks and mortar fashion retail, consumer culture, the sensory retail experience and visual merchandising.

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